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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - LEBANON AND SYRIA - ISRAEL AND PALESTINE - IRAQ: FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT
PARIS - FRIDAY, MARCH 04, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

1. LEBANON AND SYRIA
2. ISRAEL AND PALESTINE
3. IRAQ - FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT

(B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

ISSUES SURROUNDING FRENCH HOSTAGE FLORENCE AUBENAS HELD IN IRAQ AND PRIME MINISTER RAFFARIN'S DECISION TO KEEP PARLIAMENT MEMBER DIDIER JULIA FROM NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE HOSTAGE TAKERS MAKES THE FRONT PAGES OF A MAJORITY OF DAILIES.

SERGE JULY, PUBLISHER OF LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (AUBENAS' EMPLOYER) PENS AN EDITORIAL IN WHICH HE PRAISES RAFFARIN FOR HIS FIRM LINE THAT WILL PREVENT THE HOSTAGE-TAKERS FROM BEING ABLE TO "PLAY THE FRENCH EMISSARIES AGAINST EACH OTHER WHICH RESULTS IN INNUMERABLE COLLATERAL DAMAGES." THE EDITORIAL IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO STRESSES THAT "NATIONAL UNITY IS THE BEST DEFENSE FACED WITH THE HOSTAGE TAKERS."

POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER DAILY FRANCE SOIR CARRIES AN INTERVIEW WITH ANTOINE BASBOUS, DIRECTOR OF THE OBSERVATORY OF ARAB COUNTRIES, UNDER THE SUB-HEADING: "THE U.S. IS CAPABLE IF BOMBING IRANIAN NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS." BASBOUS GIVES AN OVERVIEW OF THE VARIOUS "HOT SPOTS" IN THE MIDDLE EAST. HE CALLS THE SITUATION IN LEBANON "VERY PROMISING. THANKS NAMELY TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICULARLY THANKS TO THE FRANCO-AMERICAN ALLIANCE THAT HAS UNDERTAKEN TO FREE LEBANON FROM SYRIAN OCCUPATION." (SEE PART C) REGARDING IRAN, BASBOUS INSISTS THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS UNDERTAKEN WITH IRAN BY THE FRENCH, GERMANS AND BRITISH WILL PROVE IN THE LONG RUN "THAT THE EU DOES NOT HAVE THE POWER NECESSARY TO DISSUADE TEHERAN. I AM AFRAID THAT THE LIMITS OF DIPLOMACY WILL QUICKLY BECOME EVIDENT."

"FOUR YEARS TO CHANGE THE WORLD. BUSH'S AMERICA 2005-2008" THE LATEST WORK BY BRUNO TERTRAIS, RESEARCHER AT THE FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC RESEARCH IS REVIEWED IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION. TERTRAIS WRITES: "EUROPE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT BUSH'S AMERICA POSES LEGITIMATE QUESTIONS CONCERNING WORLD GOVERNANCE, INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE USE OF FORCE. [EUROPE] HAS THE CHOICE OF EITHER PROMOTING CHANGE IN THE WORLD ALONGSIDE THE U.S. OR WATCHING THE WORLD CHANGE WITHOUT IT." TERTRAIS ALSO CALLS FRENCH DIPLOMACY'S PENCHANT FOR MULTIPOLARITY "ILLUSORY" AND PROMOTES A FORM OF DIPLOMACY THAT WOULD BE MADE UP OF "TWO THIRDS BLAIR AND ONE THIRD CHIRAC."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

LEBANON AND SYRIA

"BUSH AND HIS VICTORIES"

IVAN RIOUFOL IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (03/04): "THE SPREAD OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS REACHING LEBANON. WHICH HAS BEEN INSPIRED BY THE ELECTIONS IN IRAQ. INDEED THE COURAGE OF THE IRAQI VOTERS ON JANUARY 30, WHO DEFIED THE THREAT OF TERRORIST ATTACKS IN ORDER TO VOTE HAS PROMPTED THE LEBANESE TO BRAVE THE BAN ON DEMONSTRATING AND DEMAND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE SYRIAN OCCUPIER. TODAY EVENTS PROVE THAT GEORGE BUSH'S POLICY WITH RESPECT TO TOPPLING TYRANTS THROUGH MILITARY MIGHT AND THEREBY CREATING A 'DOMINO EFFECT' [IN THE MIDDLE EAST] IS JUSTIFIED. THERE IS A CERTAIN SATISFACTION IN SEEING THE EMBARRASSMENT THAT THIS CAUSES AMONG THE FRENCH ANTI-BUSHITES, WHO ABOUND AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND IN THE PRESS. ALTHOUGH IT IS TOO EARLY TO MAKE A GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULTS OF AMERICAN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. NONE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IN LEBANON, IN IRAQ, IN PALESTINE OR IN THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE IF THE AMERICANS AND THEIR ALLIES HAD NOT SET THE BALL ROLLING. IT IS HIGH TIME FOR FRANCE. TO GET ON BOARD."

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

"DIPLOMACY BETWEEN WORDS AND DEEDS"

THOMAS FERENCZI IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE (03/04): "EUROPEANS

ARE ADAMANT THAT THEY HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN SETTling THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT. THEY REFUSE TO LET AMERICA HAVE THE MONOPOLY IN DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS. BUT EUROPE'S POWERLESSNESS IS NOT THE RESULT OF INTERNAL DIVISIONS, IT IS DUE ON THE ONE HAND TO ISRAEL'S REFUSAL TO ALLOW EUROPE TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND ON THE OTHER HAND TO ITS INABILITY TO BE AT THE SAME LEVEL, MILITARILY OR FINANCIALLY, AS THE U.S.. NEITHER THE ISRAELIS NOR THE PALESTINIANS ARE CONVINCED OF THE LEGITIMACY OF EUROPEAN MEDIATION. THE SETTLEMENT OF THIS CONFLICT REPRESENTS A REAL TEST FOR THE `EUROPEAN POWER.'"

IRAQ - FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT

"IRAQ: STILL UNCERTAIN"

JEAN-CLAUDE KIEFER IN REGIONAL DAILY LES DERNIERES NOUVELLES D'ALSACE PENS AN EDITORIAL (03/04): "THE SHIITE AND KURDISH PARTIES SEEM INCAPABLE OF AGREEING ON A GOVERNMENT, WHICH, IN ANY CASE, WOULD HAVE NO REAL AUTHORITY.... A FULL MONTH AFTER THE ELECTIONS, THE SITUATION IS STILL CONFUSING. KURDISH SEPARATISM IS A REALITY. THE SHIITES ARE STRENGTHENING THEIR HOLD ON THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, RESULTING IN A STRONGER SUNNI REBELLION SUPPORTED BY AL-QAIDA-INSPIRED ISLAMISTS AND ALSO BY "SECULARS" FROM THE FORMER BAAS PARTY. IN IRAQ, NOTHING IS SETTLED...EVEN IF PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH AND HIS SECRETARY OF STATE CONDOLEZZA RICE STRIVE TO MAKE US BELIEVE OTHERWISE." LEACH